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Subject: Let's Talk About Forest Products After the War
(A discussion outline for the question of public regulation
of timber cutting.)

Field Distribution: Extension Editors, BAE Analysts, OD Marketing Reports Chiefs,
FCA, FSA, SCS Regional Information Chiefs, Postwar Planning
list.

Suggested Use: Information aid for members and leaders of local discussion
groups.

Can our forests meet postwar requirements for timber in this country? Can the United States help to supply the forest products that will be needed in large quantities for postwar reconstruction in foreign countries? What opportunities will there be for development of new forest industries locally? Can our forests contribute to an "economy of abundance," or will timber be an increasingly scarce and costly material?

The answers to these questions concern every citizen -- farm or city dweller, laborer or businessman. Wood is one of our essential raw materials. The productivity of our forests may have profound effects upon employment, industrial development, community stability, and general welfare.

The answers will depend upon how we handle our forests. One of the proposed forest conservation measures that is getting increasing attention is public regulation of timber cutting and other forest practices. The proposal looks to the prevention of unnecessarily destructive practices in the forests as a means of stopping progressive forest deterioration and of maintaining forest lands in a reasonably productive condition. It merits wide study and discussion.

Background Facts

Postwar Needs for Wood Will be Heavy. -- The War has been making heavy demands on our forests. It has demonstrated the indispensability of wood. War needs have caused supplies for civilian use to be cut to the bone, and a backlog of postwar civilian construction and repair needs has been piling up. The huge reconstruction job in the war-torn countries of Europe and the Orient may bring continuing pressure on our forests to supply more than domestic requirements.

Many industries are directly dependent upon the forests; wood is needed in one form or another in practically every industry and enterprise. The range of utility for wood in its natural state is being expanded by new engineering developments, and it is becoming increasingly important as a raw material for a variety of chemical and pulp products.

We are not growing timber as fast as we are using it. -- For years the drain on our forests has exceeded the rate of growth, and the war undoubtedly has accentuated this disparity. The Forest Service estimated that total drain on the nation's forests in 1942 exceeded total usable growth by 50 percent. Saw-timber growth is currently not much more than half of anticipated postwar requirements.

We no longer have abundant sawtimber supplies accessible throughout the country. More than two-thirds of the remaining sawtimber is concentrated in the West, and western old-growth stands are being steadily reduced. In the Eastern half of the country, which contains three-fourths of the Nation's commercial forest area, forest capital or growing stock is generally below the level needed to sustain the current rate of cutting.

Destructive Methods of Cutting Still Prevail.—Since earliest days timber cutting in this country has been concerned primarily with utilizing the trees which happened to be found in the forest, rather than with maintaining the growth of a valuable crop from the land. Although an increasing number of progressive timber operators and many farm woodland owners in every region are demonstrating that good forestry is a practical proposition, liquidation is still the prevalent practice. The Forest Service estimates that probably 80 percent of all cutting on privately-owned forest land is still done without conscious regard for future productivity.

Timber Can Be Grown.—With reasonably good management, our forest land would be ample to produce continuously all of the wood that we are likely to need. It is not necessary that we stop cutting either virgin timber or second-growth to conserve our forests. However, in meeting our needs we ought to apply cutting practices and other measures that will assure adequate new growth. Timber can be grown as a crop. There is no need for curtailing our consumption of wood, providing we take the necessary steps to produce it in abundance.

Public Regulation of Timber Cutting

The most urgent need is to stop destructive cutting. To this end, the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service have proposed public control to prevent improper cutting and other destructive practices. In 1941 a Joint Congressional Committee appointed to study the forest problem recognized the need for public regulation. Public control has been endorsed by a number of organizations.

Under the plan recommended by the Department of Agriculture basic standards or levels of forest practice would be set up by national legislation, and would be aimed at keeping the lands reasonably productive by insuring reproduction, prohibiting premature or wasteful cutting of young timber and preventing certain other destructive practices. If a State failed to enact and carry out adequate regulatory laws in line with these basic standards, the federal government, through the Secretary of Agriculture, would be authorized to take direct action. Consistent with these standards, local forest practice rules would be formulated with the help of local advisory boards so as to fit the varied requirements of different localities and forest conditions. The proposal visualizes the establishment of a representative advisory council at the national level.

Forest land owners would not be restricted as to how fast or when to cut timber, nor would they be required to cut if they didn't want to. But the proposal would require them to observe certain rules of good forest practice if and when they did cut, in order to prevent forest destruction and deterioration.

It should be recognized that public regulation is only one part of a comprehensive conservation program to assure abundant and continuing supplies of timber. Certain other measures also have been recommended, -- including more public forests, post-war forest restoration and improvement work, and various cooperative aids to private owners in protection and management of forests and woodlands. These, however, involve questions of such broad scope that they might well be topics for separate discussion.

Questions for Discussion

In a group discussion of the problem of postwar timber supplies it is suggested that a general review of the current forest situation and proposed remedial measures be first presented by the discussion leader or by a speaker designated by him. Questions such as the following may then be presented for open discussion.

1. Is regulation of forest practice necessary?

What is the local situation as to future timber supplies? Are the wood-using industries in our town(county, or state) assured of permanent supplies or is it likely that they will eventually have to shut down for lack of raw material? Is the prospect of future timber production in this territory good enough to attract new forest products industries?

Present number of local wood-using plants, number of employees, or volume of production in comparison with earlier years might be cited as an indication of the trend. Forest Survey reports, which contain data on timber drain in relation to growth, have been issued by the Forest Service for a number of States and regions

What has been the experience of other communities? Perhaps some members of the group have first hand knowledge of localities where the general practice of selective cutting or "sustained yield" forest management guarantees permanence of local timber supplies. Communities whose wood-using industries obtain their timber mainly from national forests can count on a steady supply of raw material.

On the other hand, many communities are on the downgrade because of exhaustion of local timber supplies. Mill shutdowns have meant decline in population, or have caused serious unemployment. Large areas of cut-over land have become tax delinquent, adding to the tax burden on remaining residents or undermining local government service. Perhaps there are such communities in your region.

To what extent are we concerned with the national timber situation? How will an increasing scarcity of forest products affect our individual business or our personal welfare? How much of the lumber we use comes from other States or regions?

Can we count on continued adequate supplies at reasonable cost, even from distant sources?

If ours is a lumber exporting community, will a national scarcity adversely affect our future markets by encouraging use of other materials in place of wood?

Can our nation continue strong and prosperous without adequate and continuing forest resources?

Are there any adequate alternatives to public regulation as a solution to the problem of forest depletion? A growing number of timber owners are practicing good forestry. Is there any likelihood that satisfactory forestry will become the general practice on a voluntary basis? Is there any real assurance of self-regulation by the forest industries? Is it certain to work, or may there be too many destructive operators among the thousands of forest owners?

How long can we afford to wait? Has progress in the last 50 years without

regulation been satisfactory?

If action is too long delayed, won't even more drastic measures become necessary in the national interest?

2. Just what should a forest regulation plan cover?

The proposal of the Department of Agriculture advises public control sufficient only to prevent practices which would result in destruction or deterioration of forests. This would be somewhat below the level of forest practice already applied voluntarily by many progressive owners.

Is that going far enough? To far? Under broad general standards, should specific practices be formulated for each locality?

3. What are the merits of the proposed plan for public regulation of timber cutting and related practices?

Favorable features that have been cited:

It will mean assurance that all forest lands will be maintained in reasonably productive condition.

It will help business by safeguarding timber supplies for local forest industries, making for steady employment and stability of communities. It would thus help maintain private enterprise.

It will help to keep forest products from becoming increasingly scarce and high-priced.

It will protect the public-spirited and progressive timber operator from the cut-out-and-get-out operator, and provide basic "rules of the game" equally applicable to all.

4. What objections to public regulation?

Conflict with ideal of free private enterprise?

Possibility of certain private interests gaining control of the regulatory machinery?

Possibility of arbitrary or bureaucratic enforcement?

Difficulty of administration and enforcement; lack of agreement as to "rules of practice."

5. Can these objections be met?

Will regulation under democratic processes help to safeguard free enterprise? Is it desirable compromise between public interest and unrestricted individual license?

What precedents do we have in the way of other desirable forms of public regulation? Railroads? Public utilities? Meat packing industry? Zoning laws? Forest fire protection?

Is a regulatory plan workable? How can public opinion and efforts be fully

enlisted to eliminate enforcement difficulties? Can simple effective rules of forest practices be readily formulated? How can a desirable degree of flexibility be attained?

6. State or Federal regulation?

Should regulation of forest practices be handled by the individual States? Is forestry on private lands solely a matter of state jurisdiction? Can state regulation be kept free of political influence? Can it be kept free of domination by forest industries? Will state regulation achieve national conservation goals?

Should regulation be handled directly by the federal government? Is federal regulation constitutional? Can it be safeguarded from arbitrary bureaucratic administration?

Should it be handled by the States under basic standards set up through National legislation, with the federal government authorized to act directly in any state which failed within a reasonable time to enact or enforce adequate regulatory measures? (This is the plan that has been proposed by the Department of Agriculture).

7. What can our group (or community) do about the problem?

Study and practice good forest management on our own holdings?

Recommend appropriate action on a nationwide scale?

References

Reports of the Chief of the Forest Service, 1941, 1942, 1943.

Reports of the Secretary of Agriculture for 1942 (pgs. 199-201); 1943 (pgs. 185-6).

The Need for the Conservation of Our Forests. Address by Chief of the Forest Service, Friends of the Land, Chicago, Ill., November 12, 1943 (Mimeographed).

A Forest Program to Help Sustain Private Enterprise. Address by Chief of the Forest Service, National Lumber Manufacturers Association, Chicago, Ill., Dec. 13, 1943. (Mimeographed).

Forest Lands of the United States -- Report of the Joint Congressional Committee on Forestry. Senate Document No. 32, 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941.

Some Plain Facts About the Forests, Forests Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Forest Resource Conservation. U.S.D.A. Yearbook Separate No. 1741. 1941.

Forest Survey reports (available from Regional Forest Experiment Stations).

To Get Somewhere in Discussion

As sponsor of the meeting. -- Send this Guide to group members beforehand. Select one of the group to serve as discussion leader. Notify him well in advance. Invite specialists and representatives of other activities to join in. Make everyone comfortable. Chairs in a circle. Introduce everybody.

As member of the group. -- Enter into the discussion freely. Tell what you know and think. Speak briefly and to the point. Listen well and give others a chance. Reach for the truth. Check your prejudices. Everyone stay seated. Keep it one discussion.

As leader of discussion. - Study the Guide in advance. Ask others to study special parts. Prepare your own discussion plan, timely questions that matter most locally. On every question get local experience and judgment into the open first. Draw on material in the Guide whenever it is helpful.

Keep your own view out of it mainly. Aim at 100 percent participation. Sum up discussion now and then. Keep it on the track. You want it to get somewhere. If you need another session to finish the job, plan one. Plan for action.

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